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Jacksonville, Thursday, March 9, 1989

A VERSE FOR TODAY

*For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I
have much people in this city. — Acts 18:10*

Base pollution cleanup will be big job for secretary of defense

The next secretary of defense, be he John Tower or someone else, has the unenviable chore of dealing with a major problem of pollution at the nation's military bases.

A series of articles in the Patriot and Evening News of Harrisburg, Pa., shows the problem to be widespread "despite a decade of studies and a multibillion-dollars Pentagon program."

Using the federal Freedom of Information Act, the newspaper obtained reports from the Environmental Protection Agency on three dozen bases across the nation.

The information will come as no surprise to the military. Most of it probably was gathered by the military, which is likely to have been engaged in efforts to clean up the pollution.

However the extent of the problem as outlined in the report should prompt a bigger response, both from Congress in allocating money to do the job and from the Pentagon in pushing cleanup efforts.

Among the problems cited in a Newhouse News Service article were:

- About 4 million rounds of live ammunition fired into Chesapeake Bay from Aberdeen (Md.) Proving Grounds, with some shells containing nerve gas, mustard gas, chlorine gas and various experimental chemicals.

- At Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, it was discovered that officers' housing had been built on top of a dump containing hazardous waste.

- At Orlando Naval Training Center, a lake used for fishing, boating and swimming had been for years a dumping ground for cyanide and other chemicals.

- The water table underneath Robins Air Force Base near Macon, Ga., has been contaminated through leakage of

a poisonous pesticide that has also polluted a lake.

Although the story on the series did not mention any of the Jacksonville bases, there have been well publicized instances of pollution caused by past disposal of hazardous wastes, such as the Hipps Road dump.

Nick Young, Navy spokesman, said that the Navy had followed common disposal methods at the time but, since the problem has been recognized, the Navy in Jacksonville has done its best to comply with regulations on the disposal of hazardous materials.

Young said the Navy has identified the problem areas it has, and is cleaning them up as funds become available.

In fact, John Lehman, who was secretary of the Navy until about two years ago, decreed that the Navy would be responsive not only to regulations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency but also to state and local environmental rules.

Young discounted the possibility reached in a recent report by David Neal Boehnke of Jacksonville University's Department of Chemistry that NAS pollution could be responsible for ulcerations of fish in the St. Johns River.

Naval dumps pose no threat today to the St. Johns River, Young said, and the possible threat a long way down the road will be averted by cleanup of the areas before that time.

Although the extent and nature of pollution at or near military bases is a matter of dispute, it has been admitted by the Department of Defense that a big cleanup job remains to be done. The Patriot-News series confirms that fact with graphic examples.

This has to be a top priority for the next defense secretary and if he is to attack the problem vigorously, Congress will have to supply the money.